

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY'S CREATIVE WORKS

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**Abstract:** *It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Christopher Buckley to the modern literary process of the USA. In this article the author tries to investigate the secrets of his popularity which lay in the autobiographical elements of his satire. Thus, this article is based on the writer's memoir and a few researches that have been made. The primary? The focus of this article is to draw attention to Christopher's Buckley literary legacy.*

**Key words:** *satire, writer, novels, biography*

Christopher Taylor Buckley is a modern American writer, satirist and journalist, born into a wealthy family. He was the only child of William F. Buckley, Jr. (1925–2008), a major figure in the US conservative movement in the second half of the 20th century, founder of the National Review. William F. Buckley, Jr. also wrote more than fifty books and hosted the PBS talk show Line of Fire for thirty-three years. Christopher's mother, Patricia Aldien Austin Taylor Buckley (1926–2007), came from a wealthy Canadian family and became a leading figure in New York society upon her marriage.

Buckley's parents sent him to the boarding school at Portsmouth Abbey in Rhode Island, run by Benedictine monks, and then to his father's alma mater, Yale. While studying at the university, he, like his father, was a member of the Skull and Bones circle. After graduating from university, Buckley joined the US Merchant Marine during the Vietnam War. However, he did not take part in the hostilities and upon his return to land he wrote the book "Steaming to Bamboola". In this book, he described his journey on a steamboat across the Atlantic and the crew members he worked with.

In 1981, Buckley moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a speechwriter for Vice President George W. Bush. It was this experience in this position that became the fundamental element for the themes of the political satirical novels of the writer. However, the writer's work is not limited to the framework of political satire, he has written 12 satirical novels at the moment, where he covered both history and all spheres of power and business. He was awarded the Thurber Award for American Humor and the Washington Irving Medal for Literary Excellence.

In addition, the author also has travel writing, memoirs, essays and many articles in newspapers. Christopher Buckley is considered a journalist by profession, and therefore his work in the literary field has not been sufficiently studied. He has served as editor-in-chief for Esquire magazine and editor-in-chief for Forbes magazine.

For some time in the summer and fall of 2008, Christopher Buckley wrote a front-page column for the National Review, a conservative magazine founded by his father. He stopped writing the column after endorsing Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in October of that year. Buckley's endorsement (titled "Sorry Dad, I vote for Obama") appeared in The Daily Beast. At the moment, Christopher Buckley is mostly busy writing novels and rarely gives interviews.

Like many writers, Christopher Buckley drew themes for his novels from his life situations. He talked about his difficult life in an interview with the New York Times, quoting the Queen of England "an annus horribilis" (hard times), just before the publication of his memoirs *Losing Mum and Pup: A Memoir* (2009). In this book, published after the death of both parents, Buckley details all the difficulties of life with famous parents and the "difficult" relationship with his father.

In view of the lack of research on Buckley's work, his interviews and memoirs are almost the only sources on this author.

In an obituary he wrote to his mother and published in his memoir, *Losing Mum and Pup: A Memoir*, Christopher Buckley said: "Pat Buckley found herself easily among celebrities from the worlds of politics, literature, art, philanthropy, fashion and society. Among her friends were Henry and Nancy Kissinger, Ronald and Nancy Reagan ... [and two dozen other celebrities]". As detailed in his memoirs, Buckley loved his parents but sometimes found these two famous and powerful characters difficult. "Larger-than-life characters create larger-than-life dramas".

Among other things, he argued with his father over the elder Buckley's insistence on maintaining strict Catholic orthodoxy while his son was moving away from the church towards agnosticism. "Father never gave up an inch". Buckley suggested that of the approximately 7,000 letters and emails he exchanged with his father, about half were controversial. The younger Buckley realized early on that his father's opinion on the religious question would not change. "Only now, after his death, can I write about it without fear of starting another cannonade ... on the topic of my eternal damnation". However, Christopher Buckley, during his father's lifetime, wrote an "affectionate farce" about corrupt vintner monks, which was mocked by his devout relatives, with the exception of his father, who "found no humor in it".

Chris Buckley fought with his mother over her tendency to ridiculously lie in front of guests, such as when she told a Kennedy relative that she was a sub-juror in the assassination trial of Kennedy's cousin Michael Skakel.

For years, Christopher tried to dissuade his mother from creating these harrowing scenes, at times not talking to her and writing letters to her to denounce her.

The elder Buckley was known for his impatience. On the day Christopher graduated from Yale University, his father got bored ten minutes into the ceremony, so he got up, gathered his friends and family, and went to have lunch. After the ceremony, the son had to wander around the Yale campus in search of his family, and ended up having lunch alone. "When I ran into him at home, gnashing his teeth, he just said nonchalantly, 'I just assumed you had other plans. These and other situations of strange parental behavior described in Buckley's memoirs explain the presence of sarcasm on the pages of his prose. Also based on religious misunderstandings in the family, *The Lord Is My Broker*, a parody of self-help books, may be a critique of his father's devout Catholicism.

The formation of the writer is also covered in his memoirs. Buckley wrote that his father "always encouraged and praised me for what I wrote, and criticized me just as often". However, in the later years of his life, Buckley Sr. found it increasingly difficult to praise anything Christopher had written "unless it was about him". When reviewers praised what they called Christopher Buckley's finest work – 2007's *Boomerang Day* – his father limited his comments to an email postscript, writing, "It didn't work for me. I'm sorry" or "As for your new book, my opinion is negative".

A milestone in the work of Buckley was a position in the White House. Working in the presidential administration, with all the constant staff feuds, the quest to gain access to the president, and the effort to make bad news look good, led Buckley to view the job as a target-rich medium for satire. He realized that the White House was the perfect setting for satire "from day one", and after leaving he wrote his first satirical novel, *White House Hustle*.

Of those few studies on Buckley, the work of William Warford, who in his dissertation compared him with the British writer and journalist Evelyn Waugh, should be noted. Warford compared the two writers based on the similarities in their biographies: both writers from wealthy families with brilliant education, and the commonality of satire in their novels. However, the privileged society in which they appeared, grew up and worked became the object of ridicule in their novels.

Thus, Evelyn Waugh's work spans the post-war modernity, the upper class of British society, especially the education and penitentiary systems, as well as the established Fleet Street media moguls. While Buckley, far less known and studied, makes fun of all three branches of government and the growing lobbying industry. The political media establishment in New York and Washington, in particular, dominates Buckley's work.

In general, the author did a good job of analyzing Decline and Fall, A Fistful of Ashes, Evelyn Waugh's The Sensation and White House Hustle, The Little Green Men, Christopher Buckley Smoking Here, and came to the conclusion that both writers stopped writing satire because of the absurdity of the society they lived in. However, the pause was short-lived, they returned to satire not as an attempt to change the world, but rather as a means of "revenge", helping to survive the absurdity of what was happening.

Another factor in comparing the work of the two writers is that Buckley calls Evelyn Waugh his "favorite writer". Buckley's novels, like Waugh's, reflect their life experience, a society that is incapable of improvement, which is so disgusting to them.

However, William Warford was wrong in claiming that Buckley's satire was as merciless as Waugh's. Buckley maintains a certain neutrality when mocking the system, as in "They Eat Puppies, Don't They?" the American leadership is not condemned, but on the contrary, in the description of the president and Henry Kissinger one can feel the respect and authority of the persons. It is they who decide the outcome of the confrontation. Consequently, Buckley is ridiculing only a certain part of the system, and not the puppet power apparatus itself, controlled by the richest representatives of the country. It can be assumed that William Warford wanted to flesh out satire in only three of Buckley's novels, and not in his entire work.

Also interesting is the definition of satire and Waugh and Buckley's own novels, which Warford singled out.

Waugh, considered by many to be the greatest satirical writer of the 20th century, was most likely ironic when he denied in Life magazine that his own writing was satirical: "No. Satire is a matter of the Period. It thrives in a stable society and assumes homogeneous moral standards – the early Roman Empire and 18th century Europe. It focuses on inconsistency and hypocrisy. She exposes cruelty and stupidity, exaggerating them. She seeks to cause shame. All this has no place in the Age of the Common Man, where vice no longer expresses virtue in words.

Waugh claimed that his work is not satire, but "merely mimesis: it's reality – a farce". Waugh often deviated from satire – or, as he would say, mimesis – writing historical novels, travel writing, even a biography of the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion. Half a century after Evelyn's death in 1966, another critically acclaimed satirist came to a similar conclusion about his era. Christopher Buckley, after writing nine satirical novels, switched to historical fiction, preferring to copy the humor of the past rather than the present.

"I think you need about 90 percent of the truth to make a good satire", he said in an interview in 2018.

"That's why I (temporarily) gave up on satire, since there is no truth in the circus that is now in Washington, DC. It's a little glib, but I think the more realistic the better".

In a 2017 interview with The Wall Street Journal in support of his historical fiction novel *The Relic Collector*, about a 16th-century conspiracy to create the Shroud of Turin; Buckley explained, “The problem with attempts at political satire has more to do with American politics, reaching the point of ridiculing itself”.

Buckley looks to Swift for his favorite definition of satire. Paraphrasing the author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, he calls satire “a mirror of reality in which everyone recognizes everything except his own reflection” (interview with Buckley). every face except our own”. Not just “reality”, but what each of us sees in the mirror – our own face.

According to William Warford, Buckley’s departure from satire – from ridicule of modern society, and switching to the absurdity of the distant past – was due to his satirical novel, “*They Eat Puppies, Don’t They?*” (2012), was not a sales success, and then America elected a “clown” as president (about Trump’s election), making the satire not only meaningless, but also banal” (Buckley).

However, we do not agree with this opinion in view of the fact that the author himself explains his departure from political satire precisely by the election of a “jester” as the president of the country. On top of that, this novel was not a failure in the ratings.

The official website of Amazon has reviews of American newspapers and magazines about the novel, which evaluate this book extremely positively and emphasize the skill of the writer.

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